

## **Title: “Beyond Cure: Nurse–Peer Partnerships Supporting Long-Term Liver Health and HCC Surveillance”**

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**Background:** Despite the availability of curative HCV treatment, many people remain at risk of advanced liver disease and hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), particularly when disengaged from ongoing care. Engagement in HCV care and HCC surveillance is often hindered by stigma, service inaccessibility and fragmented systems of care. Nurse-led HCV models partnered with peers can support person-centred care and long-term engagement beyond cure.

**Methods:** A nurse–peer partnership (NPP) model of HCV care was established in Darwin in 2021, delivering weekly clinics at a local harm reduction organisation alongside flexible outreach services for priority populations. Services included HCV testing and treatment, liver disease assessment, Fibroscan, imaging referrals, HCC surveillance and linkage to specialist care.

**Results:** Since inception, the NPP has provided out-of-hospital HCV care to over 320 clients. Twenty-one (6.5%) were diagnosed with advanced fibrosis ( $\geq$ F3) or cirrhosis and offered specialist referral and/or ongoing HCC surveillance through the NPP. Following nurse-led assessment, five clients were diagnosed with HCC. Ten clients remain engaged in six-monthly HCC surveillance through the model. The NPP reduced fragmentation between community, tertiary and specialist services by providing continuity, advocacy and care coordination across the care continuum. Importantly, all clients diagnosed with HCC remained engaged with specialist oncology/hepatology services following diagnosis.

**Conclusion:** Embedding liver health assessment and HCC surveillance within community-based HCV care supported the detection of advanced fibrosis, HCC diagnoses and ongoing engagement in specialist care. Hepatitis elimination strategies must extend beyond viral cure to include equitable access to ongoing liver health monitoring and HCC surveillance. Scaling up and sustaining such models should be prioritised to accelerate WHO hepatitis elimination targets and reduce the global burden of advanced liver disease.

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